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Page: \_\_\_\_\_

# High court rules against home-care aides

On June 11, the Supreme Court made a baffling and regressive decision. It ruled that federal minimum wage and overtime laws do not protect home-

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care workers who assist people with disabilities and the elderly.

It's these folks who help people like me to live independently in our homes. Yet the high court unfairly ruled that these vital workers provide mere companionship — as babysitters do — and are therefore not entitled to labor protections under the federal Fair Labor Standards Act.

If the Supreme Court justices would spend one day living my life, they would see this is far more than just companionship. This is a service I can't live without.

I have muscular dystrophy and use a motorized wheelchair. Every day, I need physical assistance with dressing, transferring into and out of bed, toilet use,

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preparing food and doing just about any daily activity. Several people help me, and their wages are paid through a state-run program.

They are paid \$8.35 an hour. They receive no overtime or holiday pay, no paid sick or vacation leave. They have no health insurance or other fringe benefits. This makes it hard for me to find and retain the kind of reliable people I need.

But it's because of them that I have been able to lead a full, active and rewarding life. Without their help, I might have had no other option but to be needlessly stuck

in a nursing home.

Home-care workers are the key to independence for hundreds of thousands of people with disabilities. As more and more of us assert our right to live freely in our communities, the demand for these workers escalates. And with the increase in the number of aging baby boomers in the coming years, this field will see a sharp rise in the need for services.

Currently, there are more than 1 million workers helping people like me in our homes, according to Service Employees International Union, which represents 550,000 long-term careworkers.

We need to ensure that these indispensable people are compensated in a manner that reflects the true value of their work.

Shame on the Supreme Court for moving us backward.

*Mike Ervin is a disability-rights activist with ADAPT ([www.adapt.org](http://www.adapt.org)).*